

SEA OTTERS AND IRON: A GLOBAL MICROHISTORY OF VALUE AND EXCHANGE AT NOOTKA SOUND, 1774–1792*

On 25 June 1786 21-year-old Alexander Walker, ensign on a fur-trading expedition from Bombay led by the merchant James Strange, sighted the north-west coast of America. Early the next morning eight canoes, soon followed by forty more, came out to the ships. With great curiosity, Walker witnessed this first encounter between the Mowachaht people and a British merchant.

These people offered everything they had for Sale; Clothes, fishing-tackle, fish, foxes, and bears Skins. These they were willing to part with for any trifle, but Mr. Strange thinking it best not to shew too great an eagerness for their commodities, we contented ourselves with purchasing some fish. Notwithstanding their demands were so moderate, yet they were sufficiently cautious. They would not part with anything out of their hands, before they had received an equivalent.¹

Walker's early recognition of the great disparity between European and local indigenous perceptions of an 'equivalent' in exchange reaches to the heart of a commercial meeting of two maritime peoples from across the world and the value each placed on their trade goods. British merchants who had traversed the world discovered the greatly enhanced value of their iron, steel and copper in a place with little culture of metals. They also discovered the sophisticated commercial acuity of other maritime peoples they perceived as savage societies. The Mowachaht people discovered their own natural resources, especially their furs, were valued by these new global traders far beyond the locally recognized value attributed to a limited natural product. They witnessed, and indeed took part in, the making of their sea-otter furs into a short-lived global

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¹ Alexander Walker, *An Account of a Voyage to the North West Coast of America in 1785 & 1786 by Alexander Walker*, ed. Robin Fisher and J. M. Bumsted (Vancouver and Seattle, 1982), 39–40.

commodity. Exchange, value and equivalence marked what was to happen on this part of the north-west Pacific over a brief twenty-year period.

These questions of value and exchange bring me to what was to Europeans a small obscure and 'far-away place' on the north-west Pacific coast of North America — Nootka Sound (see Map). It has a very local history as a place of seasonal residence and ceremony for the Mowachaht people, a group within the larger Nuu-chah-nulth language category, dating back over four thousand years.² It also has a wide global and international history as the site of a sea-otter trade linking Britain, India and China as well as Russia, Spain, France and the USA to this coast. Europeans first encountered the peoples of Nootka Sound in the 1770s: a Spanish ship, the *Santiago*, anchored briefly near the coast in 1774, and Captain Cook spent an extended period there on his third voyage in 1778. It was the site of an international incident in 1790 — the Nootka Crisis between Spain and Britain, which witnessed the British issuing an ultimatum of war after Spanish acts of possession at Nootka, and provocation of British and American merchant vessels arriving there. It was also the place of the Nootka Conventions of 1790–4 that settled disputes over claims to territories and led, some decades later, to the settlement of borders between the US and British Columbia. By 1820 several hundred European vessels had stopped on the coast, with the largest concentration of thirty-two vessels in 1792.³ This is a place with a rich documentation in journals and artefacts written and collected during the brief period between 1778 and 1792, but now relatively forgotten in our recent histories of global trade flows.

This article investigates accounts of incidents of trade in sea-otter furs in exchange for iron and copper as recorded by European merchants and explorers between 1774 and 1792, and especially the account provided by Alexander Walker in 1786. Walker's account offers a window into the connections between the Pacific and the English East India Company, and private trade that connected the Pacific with the Indian Ocean and east Asia. I therefore approach Nootka Sound, the events that took place there and the sources that document it, from the specific point of view of a global history of commodity trade flows between Europe, south and east Asia, and the Pacific. I draw on the observations in a few of the several European and American accounts which recorded a rich, but short-lived trade in European iron and

² Robin Fisher, *Contact and Conflict: Indian-European Relations in British Columbia 1774–1890*, 2nd edn (Vancouver, 1992), 4–5; Mowachaht-Muchalaht First Nations, 'Yuquot Agenda Paper', in Alan L. Hoover (ed.), *Nuu-chah-nulth Voices: Histories, Objects and Journeys* (Victoria, BC, 2000), 11–32, 17.

³ Warren L. Cook, *Flood Tide of Empire: Spain and the Pacific Northwest, 1543–1819* (New Haven and London, 1973), Appendix E.

VANCOUVER ISLAND AND THE NORTH-WEST PACIFIC COAST*



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copper for Pacific sea-otter furs to be traded to China. I focus especially on the neglected Alexander Walker, who arrived on the Pacific coast from India in 1786 and returned to India the year after, and was only some years later to write up the notes of a journal into three draft accounts of his reflections on the people and trade of Nootka. By then these accounts were written through the lens of his experience in India. I address more specifically Walker's observations of 1786, though as he recalled them some years later, and those of some others on the encounter and trade of sea-otter furs for iron and copper between the Mowachaht people and European merchants. In doing so, I want to understand a long-distance trading connection and a small space in this connection which revealed complex interactions over value and equivalences. My study is thus a global history of a very specific type of long-distance commodity trade — furs for iron — as it developed within the particular locality of Nootka Sound and the specific moments of encounter and trade between indigenous peoples and Europeans travelling from the Indian Ocean.

What is global in this study is my research into a long-distance trade of an individual commodity in the very specific local context of Nootka Sound, a trading hub which differed from most other trade ports on the East India Company and private European merchant routes. This particular trading space was one part of a long trading chain which connected European metals and other goods with furs gathered here for expected sales in China. What is micro in my study is how this trade functioned in this 'small space' and over a short time period, where the goods traded had very different contexts for the groups of indigenous peoples connecting with the region and the different European and American vessels coming to this 'space'.⁴ I furthermore convey this through the observations in one idiosyncratic text left by Alexander Walker. This is a subject best approached through the multiple contexts discussed by John-Paul Ghobrial in his introduction to this volume.⁵ This space allows the historian both the view from Nootka Sound and the view from global history. Micro-analysis of a specific locality, such as this remote place, now little known to European and even global historians, connects us to the highly specific studies of villages and communities developed by the German, French and Italian microhistorians of the

⁴ On 'small spaces' see David A. Bell, 'This Is What Happens When Historians Overuse the Idea of the Network', *New Republic*, 26 October 2013, 'Many of the most interesting historical phenomena . . . have started with rapid, incredibly intense changes that took place in very small places indeed'.

⁵ John-Paul Ghobrial, 'Seeing the World like a Microhistorian', in this volume.

1970s.⁶ But a global context on Nootka Sound places it within trade flows from the Indian Ocean to the Atlantic.⁷ Indeed, studying this place raises questions for the current oceanic divisions of maritime trade that now dominate our global histories.⁸ At the same time, the study of trade within the specific site of Nootka Sound reveals division and conflict over value and exchange.⁹ Through a close reading of travel accounts, expedition reports and the diplomatic documents arising from an international crisis in 1790, it becomes possible to see how the value placed on the fur by Europeans was as a marketed trade object; for the Mowachaht people the fur also had a social and cultural value; but there was an even greater divide in the values embedded in European iron and copper. Everyday European metal objects had high market value to the Mowachaht, creating new social connections, conflicts and hierarchies between them and neighbouring communities and tribes. In this way, Walker's text is especially revealing on these misconnections of exchange, and indeed his own background and later career, as well as the circumstances of the writing of the text situate his *Account of a Voyage* within another global and late Enlightenment history.

I

A VIEW FROM NOOTKA SOUND

Nootka Sound, as we have seen, was a place of long residence for the Mowachaht First Nation of the Nuw-chah-nulth language group. The site

⁶ See Francesca Trivellato, 'Microstoria, Microhistoire, Microhistory', *French Politics, Culture and Society*, xxxiii, 1, (2015), esp. 126–9; Edoardo Grendi, 'Micro-analisi e storia sociale', *Quaderni storici*, xxxv (1977), 506–20. For a succinct and challenging social-scientific comment on connecting global and microhistory, see Jan de Vries, 'Playing with Scales: The Global and the Micro, the Macro and the Nano', in this volume. Also see Hans Medick, 'Weaving and Surviving in Laichingen 1650–1900: Microhistory as History and as Research Experience', in James Scott and Nina Bhatt (eds.), *Agrarian Studies: Synthetic Work at the Cutting Edge* (New Haven, 2001), 283, 296; Hans Medick, *Weben und Überleben in Laichingen 1650–1900: Lokalgeschichte als Allgemeine Geschichte* (Göttingen, 1996).

⁷ See Sanjay Subrahmanyam, 'Connected Histories: Notes Towards a Reconfiguration of Early Modern Eurasia', *Modern Asian Studies*, xxxi, 3 (1997). Compare Jan de Vries, 'The Limits of Globalization in the Early Modern World', *Economic History Review*, lxiii (2010), 710–33.

⁸ For an example see David Armitage, Alison Bashford and Sujit Sivasundaram, *Oceanic Histories* (Cambridge, 2017); Renaud Morieux *et al.*, 'Oceanic Histories: A Roundtable', *Journal of Colonialism and Colonial History*, xix, 2 (2018).

⁹ See Romain Bertrand, 'Where the Devil Stands: A Microhistorical Reading of Empires as Multiple Moral Worlds (Manila–Mexico 1577–1580)', in this volume.

of the trading encounters discussed here was a perfect natural harbour called Yuquot by the Mowachaht, but 'Friendly Harbour' by James Strange and Alexander Walker in *An Account of a Voyage to the North West Coast of America*.¹⁰ The Mowachaht lived in lodges made from cedar wood on a bank and midden above the shore in Yuquot over the summer period for the herring fishery and whale hunt. In September, they retreated to the inlets for the salmon fishery, then by November, thirty miles up the Sound to Tahsis taking with them the planks from their houses, and relocating to a sheltered area near a deep bay in a position secure from the winter storms.¹¹

The area around Nootka was estimated by James King, second lieutenant on Cook's voyage in 1778, to contain approximately 2,600 people with the first two of three villages containing populations of 700 to 1,000, depending on the season.¹² Eight years after Cook, Alexander Walker estimated a population at Yuquot itself at 400, though that of the area immediately along its coast at about 2,000.¹³ Alejandro Malaspina, a naval officer and explorer for Spain, on his expedition around the world in 1789–94, spent some weeks at Nootka in 1791. While there the expedition's scientists estimated the population of the whole area at 4,000 subordinate to the principal Mowachaht chief, Maquinna.¹⁴ A substantial Mowachaht community continued to live there until 1966, when it was relocated by the federal government to a reserve near the town of Gold River. At the time of this author's visit to Yuquot in July 2016, only one family lived there for much of the year, plus the seasonal staff for the lighthouse.¹⁵

¹⁰ Walker, *Account of a Voyage to the North West Coast of America*, ed. Fisher and Bumsted, 48. The harbour was named Friendly Harbour by James Strange and Alexander Walker, *ibid.*, 235, n. 130. James Strange noted 'that Bay mentioned by Captain Cook, under the name of Friendly Harbour'.

¹¹ John R. Jewitt, *The Adventures and Sufferings of John R. Jewitt: Captive of Maquinna* (1805), ed. Hilary Stewart (Seattle, 1987), 105–6.

¹² J. C. Beaglehole, (ed.), *The Journals of Captain James Cook on His Voyages of Discovery*, 4 vols., iii, *The Voyage of the Resolution and Discovery, 1776–1780* (London, 1967), 140; Walker, *Account of a Voyage to the North West Coast of America*, ed. Fisher and Bumsted, 60, 122.

¹³ Richard Inglis, 'Encounters: View of the Indigenous People of Nootka Sound from the Cook Expedition Records', in James K. Barnett and David L. Nicandri, *Arctic Ambitions: Captain Cook and the Northwest Passage* (Seattle, 2015), 136.

¹⁴ Alejandro Malaspina, *The Malaspina Expedition 1789–1794: Journal of the Voyage by Alejandro Malaspina*, 3 vols., ed. Andrew David et al. (London, 2001), ii, *Panama to the Philippines*, 184.

¹⁵ Author's visit to Yuquot in July 2016, information from Margarita James, community leader. The village was moved during the 1960s, information from Robin Inglis.

Nootka Sound was part of the wider area of the north-west Pacific coast that even today contains seventy different groups of indigenous peoples with nineteen distinct languages, divided into five different language groups. It is the area of the greatest density of different languages on the North American continent.¹⁶ Such an area poses great challenges to anthropologists seeking to move from their dense single-community studies to multi-sited approaches.¹⁷ Nootka Sound, moreover, was part of what Joshua Reid has termed a 'ča-di' maritime borderland area of about five hundred miles stretching from northern Vancouver Island to the mouth of the Columbia River.¹⁸ Within this area the Mowachaht peoples in the region around Nootka Sound, the Clayoquot people to the south along the western coast of Vancouver Island, and the Makah on the Olympic Peninsula immediately to the south of the Strait of Juan de Fuca claimed sovereignty over specific geopolitical spaces.¹⁹ The maritime surrounds of these three groups were those of strictly controlled property rights well before any European encounter; among these spaces there were regional trade, tribute relations with subordinate indigenous groups and kinship ties. Three rival chiefs, Maquinna of the Mowachaht, Wickaninnish of the Clayoquot and Tatoosh of the Makah were of the same generation, and lived through the key period of European encounter and trade into the 1790s.²⁰ Boundaries, claims on resources and property rights shaped diplomatic protocols and trading conventions among

¹⁶ E. Y. Arima, *The West Coast People: The Nootka of Vancouver Island and Cape Flattery* (Victoria, BC, 1983), 2–7; Huu-ay-aht First Nations, 'Kiix'in Agenda Paper', in Hoover (ed.), *Nuu-chah-nulth Voices*, 33–61, 39–41.

¹⁷ George E. Marcus, 'Ethnography in/of the World System: The Emergence of Multi-sited Ethnography', *Annual Review of Anthropology*, xxiv (1995), 95, 117.

¹⁸ Reid took this name, 'ča-di' from the Makah name for Tatoosh Island, a location within this five hundred-mile region: Joshua L. Reid, *The Sea is My Country: The Maritime World of the Makahs* (New Haven, 2015), 14.

¹⁹ Reid, *The Sea is My Country*, 13–15, 23–6. See Reid's discussion on pp. 14–15, of the borderland concept of Jeremy Adelman and Stephen Aron, 'From Borderlands to Borders: Empires, Nation-States, and the Peoples in Between in North American History', *American Historical Review*, civ (1999).

²⁰ Reid, *The Sea is My Country*, 85–7. Note that Maquinna [Muquinna] was also the name of a series of ranking leaders of the Mowachaht of Yuquot: Walker, *Account of a Voyage to the North West Coast of America*, ed. Fisher and Bumsted, 236, n. 135; *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, vols. iv and v, <http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/muquinna_1795_4E.html> (accessed 6 June 2019).

these groups and with the Europeans, and later, the east-coast Americans who entered these spaces.²¹

The year 1774 was the year of the first direct exchange between Europeans and the First Peoples of the north-west coast, but these voyages did not land in Nootka Sound. The Spaniard Juan Pérez Hernández sailing on the *Santiago* encountered indigenous peoples from one of the Nuu-chah-nulth groups when he sailed up the coast of Vancouver Island and anchored in a bay he named 'Surgidero de San Lorenzo'. This was later known as Nootka Sound.²² Official acts of possession up the California and north-west coast underpinned Spanish belief in its claims to the area.²³

The Spanish, then British, interest in the north-west coast was stimulated by the Russian fur trade into the north Pacific between Siberia and Alaska, and by state-sponsored expeditions from the 1760s to search for a North-west Passage. The Russians started to gather sea-otter furs off the Pacific coast of Siberia through to Alaska from the mid eighteenth century, but made no concerted entry to the North American coast until after 1799.²⁴ When Cook came to the coast in 1778 he knew of the Russian interest in sea-otter furs from his reading of a pre-publication version of William Coxe's *Russian Discoveries* (1780).²⁵ The key market for the furs was China, and especially the Qing court. Jonathan Schlesinger's *A World Trimmed with Fur* relates the engagement of the Qing court and the Manchus with China's borderlands to create a new controlled natural environment to provide for some of its luxury demand for furs. But this was never enough, and an extensive trade in

²¹ For a discussion of common rights and property among the indigenous peoples of New France, New Spain and New England, see Allan Greer, *Property and Dispossession: Natives, Empires and Land in Early Modern North America* (Cambridge, 2017).

²² Ira Jacknis, 'From Explorers to Ethnographers 1774–1870', in Charlotte Townsend-Gault, Jennifer Kramer and Ki-ke-in, *Native Art of the Northwest Coast: A History of Changing Ideas* (Vancouver, 2013), 47; Iris Engstrand, 'Setting the Stage: Spain in the Pacific and the Northern Voyages of the 1770s', in Barnett and Nicandri, *Arctic Ambitions*, 45–61, 50.

²³ The second was the expedition in 1775 led by Bruno de Hezeta with Bodega y Quadra second in command: see Cook, *Flood Tide of Empire*, 61–83.

²⁴ Alexander Etkind, *Internal Colonization: Russia's Imperial Experience* (London, 2013); Evguenia Anichtchenko, 'From Russia with Charts: Cook and the Russians in the North Pacific', in Barnett and Nicandri, *Arctic Ambitions*, 63–87, 73–4; P. A. Tikhmenev, *A History of the Russian-American Company* (Seattle and London, 1978).

²⁵ William Coxe, *Account of the Russian Discoveries between Asia and America: To Which are added the Conquest of Siberia, and the History of the Transactions and Commerce between Russia and China* (London, 1780); Cook, *Flood Tide of Empire*, 497–505.

sea-otter furs brought China into close trading networks not just with the Russians and the Japanese, but with Europeans and later Americans.²⁶

It was the descriptions in the report on Cook's third voyage in 1778, when he spent nearly a month exploring the entrance to Nootka Sound, that really spurred great interest in a new fur trade. Though Cook spent considerable time in Nootka Sound, his priority was a search for an inland navigable river that might lead to a North-west Passage. He had also 'anchored away from any Indian village in order to reduce the possibility of conflict'.²⁷ His encounters with indigenous peoples were mainly from his ship, but he left extended accounts of just how trade was conducted, accounts which informed those observations made eight years later by Alexander Walker.²⁸

Cook's account provided the incentive for the next two European voyages to the region, led first by James Hanna, travelling from Macau in 1785, and James Strange, travelling from Bombay in 1785–6. Hanna gained over 20,000 Spanish dollars for the 560 furs he collected on his first voyage.²⁹ Immediately following these there were many other merchant expeditions: ultimately the trade was not valuable enough to offset the expenses of many of the expeditions. Even so, competition became fierce: thirty-two vessels came to Nootka in 1792 alone, one hundred between 1778 and 1805. If we look beyond Nootka itself to include the adjoining coast, 292 ships came in the period 1793–1815, two-thirds of these American.³⁰ In 1806 Canton imported 17,444 pelts.³¹ Despite the number of vessels and even the number of pelts collected, the trade was not as lucrative as anticipated. The indigenous peoples drove

²⁶ Jonathan Schlesinger, *A World Trimmed with Fur: Wild Things, Pristine Places and the Natural Fringes of Qing Rule* (Stanford, 2017); James R. Fichter, *So Great a Profit: How the East Indies Trade Transformed American Capitalism* (Cambridge, Mass., 2010).

²⁷ Walker, *Account of a Voyage to the North West Coast of America*, ed. Fisher and Bumsted, editors' intro., 15. Also see Inglis, 'Encounters', in Barnett and Nicandri (eds.), *Arctic Ambitions*.

²⁸ Beaglehole (ed.), *Journals of Captain James Cook on His Voyages of Discovery*, iii; Inglis, 'Encounters', in Barnett and Nicandri (eds.), *Arctic Ambitions*.

²⁹ Fisher, *Contact and Conflict*, 4–5; Bob Galois, 'The Voyages of James Hanna to the Northwest Coast: Two Documents', *B.C. Studies*, ciii, (Autumn 1994); and W. Kaye Lamb and Tomás Bartoli, 'James Hanna and Henry Cox: The First Maritime Fur Trader and his Sponsor', *B.C. Studies*, lxxxiv (Winter 1989–90; [James Hanna], 'Journal of a Voyage from Macao towards King Georges Sound', Provincial Archives of British Columbia, Victoria. The journal, however, does not contain details from the north-west Pacific coast.

³⁰ Richard Inglis and James C. Haggarty, 'Cook to Jewitt: Three Decades of Change in Nootka Sound', in Hoover (ed.), *Nuu-chah-nulth Voices*, 92; Fichter, *So Great a Profit*, 213; Cook, *Flood Tide of Empire*, Appendix E.

³¹ Schlesinger, *World Trimmed with Fur*, ch. 4.

hard bargains, prices they demanded for the furs rose exponentially, and the Chinese market was much more erratic than first anticipated.³²

British vessels came to the coast from Macao, India and London, operating under licences from both the East India Company and the South Sea Company, which had privileges over the American west coast. Vessels selling furs in China had to have licences from both companies. Another company, the King George's Sound Company (alias The London Company), founded by Richard Etches in 1786, also had licences to operate on the north-west Pacific coast and in Canton. The Company sent out ships under Nathaniel Portlock and George Dixon, then James Colnett in 1786.³³ Vessels also soon came from Boston, and the Atlantic American trade grew rapidly on the west coast.

Nootka Sound represented a single locality within the broad framework of global trade flows that witnessed the exchange of furs for iron. Such localities, 'small spaces' in the words of David Bell, and the economic and social interactions that took place in them, offer us a glimpse into the history of lived environments, commercial interactions and social practices taking place within networks that spanned the entire globe. In this way, a focus on sites such as Nootka Sound reconnects us with the importance of local divergences in economic and social histories of the world.³⁴ The power of place needs to be built into our global histories. Global historians have not given the attention they might have to local spaces; methodological reflection on the micro-histories we build on these can challenge and refine the categories, theories and frameworks of global history.³⁵ We might analyse Nootka Sound's 'local' space further within the micro-spatial frameworks suggested by Christian De Vito, who argues for abandoning the concept of 'scale' as a tool of analysis, and instead analysing 'micro-spatial' configurations of the 'trans-local', the 'multi-sited', the 'connections' and the 'hybrid' in the history of globalization.³⁶ The problem with such an approach, however, is that it risks obscuring

³² Fisher, *Contact and Conflict*, 3; David Mackay, *In the Wake of Cook: Exploration, Science and Empire, 1780–1800* (London, 1985), 66; 3, 15–17.

³³ Cook, *Flood Tide of Empire*, 104; *A Voyage to the North West Side of America: the Journals of James Colnett, 1786–89*, ed. Robert Galois, (Vancouver, Toronto, 2004).

³⁴ See n. 5, above; Hans Medick, *Weben und Überleben in Laichingen 1650–1900*; Medick, 'Weaving and Surviving in Laichingen'; Pat Hudson, 'Closeness and Distance: A Response to Brewer', *Cultural and Social History*, vii, 3 (2010), 375–85 on the uses of quantitative history in microhistorical research.

³⁵ See Anne Gerritsen, 'Scales of a Local: The Place of Locality in a Globalizing World', in D. Northrop (ed.), *A Companion to World History* (Hoboken, NJ and Oxford, 2012).

³⁶ See Christian G. De Vito, 'History Without Scale: The Micro-Spatial Perspective', in this volume; also see his earlier formulations: 'Microstoria et Storia Globale: Interventi di Christian G. de Vito e Guido Franzinetti', *Quaderni Storici*, (Dec. 2015), 813–14;

the divisions that existed *within* this locality, not just between the European and indigenous traders, but among the indigenous peoples themselves. For the Mowachaht people and other indigenous groups with whom they interacted this was a space of extensive trade networks that extended the length of the north-west Pacific coast, one which facilitated the distribution of goods and resources across multiple different peoples. Kinship networks enabled diplomacy over the use of these spaces, many of which were animated by strict and long-established protocols over interactions and trade.³⁷ From the 1780s, Nootka Sound entered into the global networks of the European and American China trade. When Captain Cook and later Walker arrived in Nootka Sound, they were entering a locality already rife with its own divisions, rivalries and competition between different local powers. Cook and Walker wrote of the interactions of the local Mowachaht with other indigenous groups, whom they referred to as 'strangers'.

Yuquot by 1790 had become a hub for European and European-Asian, Spanish American and American vessels coming to trade for furs to take on to China, and/or to survey the coast and to pass on further north in a renewed search for the North-west Passage. This continued through the period of the Nootka Crisis and Conventions when the Spanish occupied the cove from 1790 to 1794. This international incident between the Spanish and the British placed this distant corner on the north-west Pacific coast centre stage in European geopolitics for a short period, after which it was infrequently visited by Europeans.³⁸ Places such as Nootka Sound occupy an anomalous place within our current historiographies. The history of the region lies within a specific tradition of area studies, that of Pacific histories. Yet even here, it is little studied in a tradition that mainly focuses on Australasia and the South Seas, rather than the cold, foggy and rainy regions of the north.³⁹ While a significant locale within indigenous people's histories and 'B.C. Studies', Nootka Sound needs to be connected by historians to a wider Pacific world which includes the north-west Pacific as well as the south Pacific.⁴⁰ Nootka Sound was one site among a chain of trading sites, and a microcosm of the

Christian G. de Vito, 'Towards a Translocal Microhistory (Micro-Spatial History)', *Quaderni Storici* (Dec. 2015).

³⁷ Reid, *The Sea is My Country*, 22–5.

³⁸ Cook, *Flood Tide of Empire*, 210–49; 411–23; Inglis and Haggarty, 'Cook to Jewitt', in Hoover (ed.), *Nuu-chah-nulth Voices*, 101–3.

³⁹ For a recent example see David Armitage and Alison Bashford, *Pacific Histories: Ocean, Land, People* (Basingstoke, 2014); they have not yet moved beyond this in the more recent volume, *Oceanic Histories* edited with Sivasundaram, see n. 7, above.

⁴⁰ Alan L. Hoover (ed.), *Nuu-chah-nulth Voices*.

historiographical connections we need to make to follow the global trading flows among the Indian Ocean, east Asia, the Atlantic World and the Pacific.

The maritime fur trade has been little considered in the historiography of global trade flows. Short-lived and environmentally destructive, this trade brought Nootka suddenly to European and American attention before it soon disappeared off the map of global trade flows. A focus on 'small spaces' thus adds to our understanding of global trade. These furs became a focus for European powers and the US for a short period, and brought over 400 of their trading vessels to a small place on the Pacific coast. Reports estimated that tens of thousands of these furs at any one time could be found in warehouses in Macao and Manila. This was certainly no major trade in quantitative terms. Yet both global and microhistorians studying this trade can challenge some of our assumptions. First, this trade connected to the expansion of the East India Company trade and of the private trade linked with this.⁴¹ Secondly, it brought the Boston Atlantic traders to the Pacific coast, in turn connecting them more closely to the China trade.⁴² Thirdly, a long conflict between Russian traders and Spanish territorial interests on the Pacific coast became centred on Nootka Sound. Fourthly, the China trade, with a new trade in sea-otter furs, and a newly reinvigorated search for the North-west Passage became global priorities which also focused on Nootka Sound. These four factors, studied from one small place, Nootka Sound, demonstrate the close connections in global trade between the Indian Ocean, the China Seas and the Pacific, and in turn their connections with Spanish America, Russia and European power struggles. It was the fur trade which triggered the shift in rapidly changing geopolitical realities to reveal these connections.

And yet, none of these developments have been studied with enough attention to the territorial claims and hegemony of different groups of indigenous peoples during this crucial period of change in global trade. Our studies of global trade rarely include the indigenous histories of the collection, capture and local exchange of wild plant and animal substances. More work is needed in the specialist anthropological histories based in local and oral histories of specific communities, but this needs also to be connected to the emergence of these environmental and resource-based issues as they appeared in contemporary European sources of the kind explored here.

⁴¹ See de Vries, 'Limits of Globalization in the Early Modern World'; Maxine Berg (ed.) with Felicia Gottmann, Hanna Hodacs and Chris Nierstrasz, *Goods from the East: Trading Eurasia 1600–1800* (Basingstoke, 2015).

⁴² On the American trade on the coast, see James R. Gibson, *Otter Skins, Boston Ships and China Goods: The Maritime Fur Trade of the Northwest Coast 1785–1841* (Montreal, 1992); Fichter, *So Great a Proffitt*.

II

THE SEA-OTTER TRADE AND THE NORTH-WEST PASSAGE

The sea-otter trade to China brought a great wave of merchant ventures to Nootka Sound in a brief twenty-year period. Several wrote of the gains to be had from the sea-otter hunt. The northern sea-otter furs were the most highly esteemed of furs, alongside sable, by the Qing court. Nathaniel Portlock on leaving the northern coast in 1786 wrote:

The inestimable value of their furs will ever make it a desirable trade, and whenever it is established upon a proper foundation, and a settlement made, will become a very valuable and lucrative branch of commerce . . . which would more than pay them for every article that is brought from China.⁴³

But by 1792 the Spanish naturalist José Mariano Mociño and expedition leader, Alejandro Malaspina, proffered more critical views. Malaspina at first thought there were gains to be had, and he urged the merchants of Mexico City to participate in the trade, but on reaching Manila he discovered an unpredictable Chinese trade with nearly 4,000 of the 13,839 pelts sent by the Spanish to Canton still to be sold because of a trade embargo.⁴⁴ Similarly, José Mociño entertained little prospect of gain: 'These are a luxury article for the Chinese, who pay for them in proportion to their scarcity, and since they were filling the warehouses of Canton, they have been losing value annually'.⁴⁵

The search for a North-west Passage was another incentive bringing ships to Nootka Sound or further up the coast. In a period of large-scale scientific expeditions underwritten by European states, the search for a Pacific route for a North-west Passage renewed belief in a sixteenth-century project to find a direct route across the northern seas from Europe to China. Britain's James Cook (1778), then George Vancouver (1791–5), France's La Pérouse (1787) and Spain's Alejandro Malaspina (1789–94) all led large-scale global

⁴³ [Captain Nathaniel Portlock], *A Voyage Round the World; But More Particularly to the North-West Coast of America: Performed in 1785, 1786, 1787, and 1788 in The King George and Queen Charlotte, Captains Portlock and Dixon* (London, 1789), 294.

⁴⁴ Cook, *Flood Tide of Empire*, 314–16; Donald C. Cutter, 'Introduction', in Malaspina, *Malaspina Expedition*, ed. David *et al.*, 3 vols., ii.

⁴⁵ *Noticias de Nutka: An Account of Nootka Sound in 1792 by José Mariano Mociño*, ed. and trans. Iris Higbie Wilson (Seattle and London, 1970), 88. For discussion of Spanish American attitudes to the indigenous peoples of North America, see Anthony Pagden, *The Fall of Natural Man: The American Indian and the Origins of Comparative Ethnology* (Cambridge, 1982); David Weber, *Bárbaros: Spaniards and their Savages in the Age of Enlightenment* (New Haven, 2005), esp. 31–51; and Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra, *How to Write the History of the New World* (Stanford, 2001), 44–59.

expeditions with one of their objects being the search up the north-west Pacific coast and into the Arctic Ocean for a passage connecting the Pacific with the Atlantic. All but La Pérouse stopped at Nootka, although even he sailed down the coast from his initial northern stop at Port Mulgrave in Yakutat Bay at 60 degrees latitude. In addition, several merchant expeditions claimed scientific endeavour in surveying the coast as well as mercantile profit in bids for state or East India Company backing for their voyages. Among the British this included the unfulfilled project of William Bolts (1781), then the voyages of James Strange (1785–6), of John Meares in 1786–7, of Nathaniel Portlock and George Dixon (1785–7) and of James Colnett (1786–9).⁴⁶

The impact of the transformation of Yuquot into a European and American trading hub on the Mowachaht people over this short period was to disrupt political hierarchies within the confederation, with the leading chief, Maquinna, losing his monopoly on access to European vessels and with it his political hegemony. The transformation also disrupted summer resource procurement activities away from whaling and fishing to sea-otter hunting and portering for European vessels.⁴⁷

Many of the explorers and surveyors, the naturalists on their voyages, as well as merchants and soldiers kept journals or wrote accounts of the new peoples they encountered. Some of these even learned enough of the Nuuchah-nulth language to write perceptively on the trading practices they observed. There was a lively book and print market for such accounts following the publication of Cook's *Voyages*. The early Spanish voyages were either kept secret or otherwise not publicized, but American accounts and translations of Russian narratives of the Alaska coast brought wider publicity.⁴⁸ The earliest European commentary on trading practices was that of Fray Juan

⁴⁶ See Derek Pethick, *The Nootka Connection: Europe and the Northwest Coast 1790–1795* (Vancouver, 1980), 57; *A Voyage Round the World During the Years 1790, 1791, and 1792, by Étienne Marchand: Translated from the French of C. P. Claret Fleurieu of the National Institute of Arts and Sciences, and of the Board of Longitude of France*, 2 vols (London, 1801), i, Contents; R. M. Galois, 'Nuuchah-nulth Encounters: James Colnett's Expedition of 1787–8', in Hoover (ed.), *Nuuchah-nulth Voices*; James Colnett, *A Voyage to the Northwest Side of America: The Journal of James Colnett 1786–89*, ed. Robert Galois (Seattle, 2003); Inglis and Haggarty, 'Cook to Jewitt', in Hoover (ed.), *Nuuchah-nulth Voices*.

⁴⁷ Inglis and Haggarty, 'Cook to Jewitt', in Hoover (ed.), *Nuuchah-nulth Voices*, 102–3; see Cole Harris, 'Social Power and Cultural Change in Pre-Colonial British Columbia', *B.C. Studies* (1997–8), 69–81.

⁴⁸ See Jacknis, 'From Explorers to Ethnographers', 47–90 for a summary of many of these published accounts.

Crespi, the Franciscan friar on the *Santiago* voyage of Juan Pérez in 1774, who described a brief encounter with canoes at sea, followed by the month-long sojourn of James Cook in Nootka Sound in 1778, again much of this observed from ship and longboats. The next in-depth accounts, again from observations over a month in 1786, were provided by James Strange in his report to the East India Company and Alexander Walker in his *Account of a Voyage*.⁴⁹ A number of comments on trading episodes were also left by merchants, including Colnett in 1787, Meares in 1787–8, Dixon and Portlock in 1787, and by explorers and surveyors from Malaspina in 1791 to Étienne Marchand in 1792.

The most detailed ethnographies of trading practices were, however, left in two extended accounts that were only published during the twentieth century. These were Alexander Walker's *An Account of a Voyage to the North West Coast of America in 1785 and 1786* and José Mariano Mociño's *Noticias de Nutka*. Walker had spent a month in Yuquot, but he only wrote his account years later in India. Mociño's *Noticias* was written from the naturalist's journals of a five-month stay in Yuquot in 1792 as a member of the ambassadorial expedition of Juan Francisco de la Bodega y Quadra; this too was not published until many years later.⁵⁰ The accounts bear comparison as early ethnographies, but this article focuses only on that of Walker, contextualizing his observations of trade with those of Cook and others who followed. Walker's month-long stay was also linguistically informed, as was that six years later by Mociño. Building on a glossary published in Cook's *Voyages*, and already an accomplished linguist, Walker spent his month close to or in Maquinna's village, apart from the occasions of trade on one of the ships and the longboat. As James Strange conducted all the fur trading himself, Walker was left free to observe and engage.⁵¹

⁴⁹ James Strange, *James Strange's Journal and Narrative of the Commercial Expedition from Bombay to the North-West Coast of America* (1790), ed. A. V. Venkatarama Ayyar (Madras, 1928); Walker, *Account of a Voyage to the North West Coast of America*, ed. Fisher and Bumsted.

⁵⁰ Walker, *Account of a Voyage to the North West Coast of America*, ed. Fisher and Bumsted, editors' intro.; *Noticias de Nutka*, ed. and trans. Higbie Wilson, editor's intro. Originally known as Moziño, the current usage of his name is Mociño; *Noticias de Nutka*, ed. and trans. Higbie Wilson, 9. Weber also counts Mociño as one of the botanists on the Malaspina expedition when this stopped at Nootka in 1791: see Weber, *Bárbaros*, 180.

⁵¹ Walker, *Account of a Voyage to the North West Coast of America*, ed. Fisher and Bumsted, 58–72. Walker too left an extended glossary, 277–303. There is some uncertainty over the depth of Walker's linguistic skills: see Walker, *Account of a Voyage to the North West Coast of America*, ed. Fisher and Bumsted, editors' intro., 11, who describe him as 'conversant' with Persian, Sanskrit and Arabic. But see doubts, though with no evidence provided, by

Reducing the scale of analysis from the broad global trading networks that included a maritime fur trade focused on Nootka Sound to a specific individual and the text he left brings a new and closer perspective on the trade and the place. But this also brings new complexities with what we look at, not least the fact that it was only a month that Walker spent conversing with the Mowachaht people within the year-long voyage he described in his *Account*. Walker was also well aware of prior European contact among these peoples, first with Cook's expedition, but also other commercial contact through intermediaries with Russians and the Spanish.

A distinctive point of view comes from Alexander Walker's observations of a trade between Europeans and indigenous peoples, a trade moreover in the metals of the industrial West for the animal furs of a newly discovered part of the world. Walker's perspective on this place reveals both his consciousness of the interactions among different groups of indigenous peoples in the locality, and his longer-term reflections of the part this place came to occupy in the wider global economy and in international relations. Before looking at this further, we must enquire first into Walker's background and the distinctive character of the text he left behind.

III

JAMES STRANGE AND ALEXANDER WALKER

James Strange, the son of a Jacobite, arrived in Madras in 1773 where he advanced rapidly in the English East India Company and in private trade. He approached David Scott, the leading British merchant in Bombay working in the country trade to China to finance his venture. He also submitted his plans to Joseph Banks to have his voyage endorsed as not just one of commerce, but of scientific discovery, and he equipped two ships, the *Captain Cook* and the *Experiment*, with nautical and surveying instruments.⁵² Strange took leave from the East India Company to go on the expedition, and was instructed by the East India Company to gather information on the prospects of a settlement and a fur-trading centre in the area.⁵³ He thought he was the first to arrive at Nootka Sound after Cook, but unknown to him, James

Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *Europe's India: Words, People, Empires 1500–1800* (Cambridge, Mass., 2017), 279.

⁵² Mackay, *In the Wake of Cook*, 65; Walker, *Account of a Voyage to the North West Coast of America*, ed. Fisher and Bumsted, 10.

⁵³ Letter from the East India Company to Strange, 18 March 1786, in Strange, *James Strange's Journal and Narrative of the Commercial Expedition from Bombay to the North-West Coast of America*, ed. Venkatarama Ayyar, 53.

Hanna had already reached Yuquot from Macao nine months before, returning with a rich cargo of furs.⁵⁴

Strange was not funded by the East India Company, but he took with him a young ensign, Captain Alexander Walker, then aged 21, and nineteen East India Company soldiers who 'were more artificers than mariners'. It was Walker's understanding that a permanent trading post was to be established and garrisoned under his command.⁵⁵ In the event this did not happen, which saved Walker 'from a Spanish Prison, or a visit to the Mines of Mexico'.⁵⁶ Instead of setting up a trading fort Strange left one of his crew, John Mackay, with the Mowachaht people for a year.⁵⁷

Walker was an altogether different character from Strange. He was a career soldier, an educated Scot who had attended St Andrews University, and a friend of the physician and naturalist, Helenus Scott. Through his education, his reading and inclination he was a part of the late Enlightenment.⁵⁸ The voyages of discovery that came to the coast, first with Cook, then from several other European countries were a part of his intellectual context. Walker was also only 21, but he had already distinguished himself in campaigns on the Malabar coast and at Mangalore; there during Tipu Sultan's siege he had offered himself as a hostage. With this background he was selected by the Bombay government for Strange's expedition.⁵⁹

Walker was keen to go. At this point the war in western India was concluded, many East India Company servants in Bombay were unemployed, and he 'thought to visit a country little known, which might afford many objects of curiosity'.⁶⁰ He later recalled his 'desire of seeing a Country, which had been but

⁵⁴ Galois, 'The Voyages of James Hanna'; Lamb and Bartroli, 'James Hanna and Henry Cox'.

⁵⁵ Walker, *Account of a Voyage to the North West Coast of America*, ed. Fisher and Bumsted, 10, 36.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 67.

⁵⁷ See Walker's view of MacKay in Walker, *Account of a Voyage to the North West Coast of America*, ed. Fisher and Bumsted, 20–1. See Reid's discussion of Mackay's residency with the Mowachaht in *The Sea is my Country*, 47–9. Mackay left no account of his own, but on his own return to India was interviewed by Walker.

⁵⁸ Alexander Walker (1764–1831), *Oxford DNB*, <<https://doi-org.pugwash.lib.warwick.ac.uk/10.1093/ref:odnb/28467>>.

⁵⁹ Alexander Walker (1764–1831), *Oxford DNB*. See National Library of Scotland, Walker of Bowland Papers: Proposed Publications c.1799–1830, MS 13777 on French, Spanish and British voyages between China and North-West America, 1785–9; MS 13778, 'An Account of a Voyage to the North West Coast of America'. Helenus Scott, too, was educated at St Andrews before studying medicine at Edinburgh University.

⁶⁰ Walker, *Account of a Voyage to the North West Coast of America*, ed. Fisher and Bumsted, 35.

lately in a manner discovered, and of viewing Men still living in a Savage state of Society, [which] formed one of the objects of my most anxious wish'.⁶¹

Strange wrote a Report that he submitted to the East India Company on his return. Walker too kept a journal, but revised this over a number of years after his own return to India on the basis of drafts and notes he preserved after losing the original journal. He also interviewed the surgeon's mate, John Mackay, once he too returned to India in 1788.⁶² Walker's much more extensive journal is a perceptive and rich account and reflection on the Mowachaht people and the encounter he had experienced between Europeans and indigenous peoples.

On Walker's return to India he advanced through the Indian army, quickly becoming lieutenant, and with appointments in Malabar where he studied the customs of the local population and collected manuscripts, then in Bombay. He took part in campaigns in Ceylon and in the last campaign against Tipu Sultan in 1799. He then spent eight years as political resident in Baroda, again collecting manuscripts and producing his own manuscript volumes on local customs and beliefs.⁶³

An Account of a Voyage to the North West Coast of America poses many challenges. The historiography on this region makes little use of the text in contrast to those of Cook, John Meares and later John Jewitt's captivity narrative.⁶⁴ Walker's account was never published at the time nor deposited as a report to the government or East India Company as were Cook's and Strange's. An edition was eventually published for the first time by the First Nations historians Robin Fisher and J. M. Bumsted in 1982.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 36.

⁶² Walker, *Account of a Voyage to the North West Coast of America*, ed. Fisher and Bumsted, editors' intro., 14–20.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 10–11. On Walker's historical context as a Scottish colonial administrator in India, see Subrahmanyam, *Europe's India*, 270–1. Walker's extensive collection of papers includes his historical and ethnographic accounts of Gujarat and the peoples of Kutch. See esp. National Library of Scotland, Walker of Bowland papers, MS 13861–3, 'An Account of Castes and Professions in Guzerat'; MS 13867, 'Historical Account of Gujarat'; and MS 13872–8, 'Historical Notices of the People, Religion and Customs in Different Parts of India'. His son also left his extensive collection of Persian, Sanskrit and Arabic manuscripts to the Bodleian Library: A. Walker MSS A.D. 1845 MSS 23194–23408. See Falconer Madan, *A Summary Catalogue of Western Manuscripts in the Bodleian Library at Oxford*, iv (Oxford, 1897), 674–9.

⁶⁴ John Meares, *Voyages Made in the Years 1788 and 1789, from China to the North West Coast of America* (London, 1790); Jewitt, *Adventures and Sufferings of John R. Jewitt*.

Walker lost his first journal, and reconstructed it from notes. He had an extensive lexicon as well as further notes from his interview and correspondence with Mackay. He continued to work on his *Account*, developing a larger philosophical discussion and drawing on his reading of Enlightenment texts, as well as his new experiences in Gujarat and among the tribal peoples of Kutch. His discussion of race among the North American indigenous peoples, for example, includes a passage on the Parsees.⁶⁵ Three complete drafts of the volume are in his papers in Edinburgh. The final was intended for publication, but he died in 1831 before he could see this through.⁶⁶

Walker's *Account* provided careful observation on arts and crafts, fishing techniques, ceremony and religion with its material culture in monuments, carvings and masks. He wrote broad commentaries from a late Enlightenment perspective on luxury and savage society, and on the impact of commerce on civilization. He denounced the sea-otter trade, and especially the Russians for the disease, social dislocation and corruption, and the environmental depletion it brought to the north-west Pacific, to Alaska and to Siberia. Though Walker did not make explicit reference in his text to the stadial theories of the Scottish Enlightenment which charted the characteristics of a progression from savage to civilized societies, the language and concepts he deployed in his text were certainly based in these. His reflections on the advanced commercial contacts of the Mowachaht are set in these terms:

The appearance of a Canoe at this distance from the Sound was a proof of a commercial intercourse existing of considerable extent, and that the relations of friendship that prevailed [were] beyond the usual range of Savage Life. The partnership of tribes is the most limited and jealous state of Society in existence.⁶⁷

His text also conveys the polygenist hypotheses (the belief in the different origins of peoples in various parts of the globe) of Henry Home, Lord Kames, whose *Sketches of the History of Men* was republished in 1778.⁶⁸ Kames had

⁶⁵ Walker, *Account of a Voyage to the North West Coast of America*, ed. Fisher and Bumsted, 75.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 20–2. See National Library of Scotland, Walker of Bowland Papers. MS 13776, MS 13777, MS 13778, MS 13779 and MS 13781. The volume intended for publication was MS 13780; the text edited by Fisher and Bumsted, which I use in this article, is from this final version.

⁶⁷ Walker, *Account of a Voyage to the North West Coast of America*, ed. Fisher and Bumsted, 53.

⁶⁸ See his comments on skin colour and language, *ibid.*, 76, 89.

given a questionnaire based on these hypotheses to James Lind, ship's doctor on Cook's second voyage.⁶⁹

Walker himself collected materials on and commented on many of the subject areas covered by the questionnaire.⁷⁰ The *Account of a Voyage*, therefore, was as much a reflection of contemporary Enlightenment debates about civilization as it was a response to prevailing questions about the Pacific world. Based on memories and notes made in 1786 along with the memories of Mackay who had lived with the Mowachaht people, it provided a detailed account of their dress, accommodation, daily lives, fishing, crafts, religious practices and ideas of time and measurement.⁷¹

IV

SEA OTTERS AND IRON AT NOOTKA SOUND

Looking at Walker's account, in conjunction with similar accounts by Captain Cook, we see very different perceptions of commercial exchange and value between the Mowachaht people and Captain Strange. What immediately became clear is that this was first and foremost a trade in animal skins for European iron and copper. Walker provides a close analysis of a new global commodity trade, and one conducted between Europeans and indigenous peoples. These sea-otter furs were highly desirable decoration and lining in Qing court costume. There are thousands of such items in the Palace Museum in Beijing. This was not the silver, imbued with intrinsic worth that Europeans traded to China. Rather, it was perceived by British and American merchants as a trade item to substitute for that precious silver. The iron and copper they traded in return for the furs was a resource common enough in northern Europe, and especially in England, Sweden and Russia. It was also a material, recently developed by new industrial processes, that could be applied to a great range of uses and products, and a new indicator of European industrial progress. For the Mowachaht and indeed for the other indigenous groups with whom they traded, this iron and copper was immensely valuable, the iron used in tools, and in jewellery, symbols of status, diplomatic gifts and high-level trade.

Likewise for the Mowachaht, the sea otter was recognized by them as a high-quality fur both for its beauty and its warmth, killed as needs arose for specific types of clothing and for trade and diplomatic gifts with other

⁶⁹ See Silvia Sebastiani, *The Scottish Enlightenment: Race, Gender and the Limits of Progress* (Basingstoke, 2013), 76–8, 81.

⁷⁰ I cannot here deal in depth with a textual analysis connecting Walker's text with contextual Scottish writings, but will do so in a future article.

⁷¹ *Noticias de Nutka*, ed. and trans. Higbie Wilson.

indigenous groups. It was a high-status fur, worn by chiefs as a sign of their rank. The meeting of these two distant peoples revealed new values placed on goods not previously perceived by either.

The action of trading on both sides demonstrated sophisticated negotiation and performance, but also misperception and misunderstanding. Romain Bertrand has recounted the Dutch misperception of diplomatic ritual in late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century Banten on the North Java coast.⁷² Similar ceremonies of 'first encounter' and their misperception, this time on the north-west Pacific coast were also recounted by Cook in 1778 and Walker in 1786. Cook certainly assumed at first that his was the first 'trading encounter' with the people of Nootka Sound, although he was soon to change this view. Cook and Walker described tentative first meetings. Relatively few canoes approached the ships on the first occasion, paddling around the ships, and 'one man stood upright' speaking or 'rather halloaing all the time', sometimes with his face covered with a mask. Later many canoes followed. Cook counted thirty-two, carrying up to eight persons each. These 'would not come on board, but shewed great readiness, however, to part with anything they had, and took from us whatever we offered them in exchange'.⁷³ Walker recounted the approach of the *Captain Cook* under James Strange, and the *Experiment*, to the Sound on 26 June 1786. Nearly forty canoes were seen coming from different parts of Hope Bay, most with two people, but some with four and others with ten. 'They in general advanced towards us with great confidence, introducing themselves, as they drew near, by short harangues, which they pronounced standing, and accompanied with gestures, and motions of the hands, too violent to be graceful . . . two of them, when invited, readily went on board of the C. Cook'.⁷⁴

Fray Juan Crespi had written about the approach of the *Santiago* to the coast of Haida Gwaii, islands some distance to the north of Vancouver Island, four years before Cook on 21 August 1774. When the ship was a league from land, canoes began to put out, twenty-one of them, 'containing more than

⁷² Romain Bertrand, 'Spirited Transactions: The Morals and Materialities of Trade Contacts between the Dutch, the British and the Malays 1596–1619', in Maxine Berg *et al.*, *Goods from the East*.

⁷³ Beaglehole (ed.), *Journals of Captain James Cook on His Voyages of Discovery*, iii, 338–40; Strange and Walker also described early approaches with few canoes. Strange, *James Strange's Journal and Narrative of the Commercial Expedition from Bombay to the North-West Coast of America*, ed. Venkatarama Ayyar, 17; Walker, *Account of a Voyage to the North West Coast of America*, ed. Fisher and Bumsted, 39.

⁷⁴ Walker, *Account of a Voyage to the North West Coast of America*, ed. Fisher and Bumsted, 39.

two hundred men, women, boys and girls', the 'occupants singing and playing instruments of wood fashioned like drums or timbrels & some making movements like dancing'.⁷⁵ Crespi continued:

Presently there began between them and our people a traffic, and we soon knew that they had come for the purpose of bartering their effects for ours. The sailors gave them knives, old clothing and beads, and they in return gave skins of the otter and other animals unknown, very well tanned and dressed; coverlets of otter skins sewn together so well that the best tailor could not sew them better.⁷⁶

Crespi recognized the high levels of handicraft on the otter skins, and through this the value attached by the indigenous peoples to the skins.

Mociño, some years later, drawing on the memories and oral histories of the Mowachaht, wrote about the impact of the arrival of the *Santiago* near to Nootka Sound two weeks after its first encounters off Haida Gwaii:

The sight of this ship at first filled the natives with terror, and even now they testify that they were seized with fright from the moment they saw on the horizon the giant 'machine' which little by little approached their coasts . . . the most daring took their canoes out . . . They approached it timorously, without sufficient courage to go aboard, until after awhile, attracted by the friendly signs by which the Spanish crew called them, they boarded the ship and inspected with wonder all the new and extraordinary objects that were presented to them. They received a number of gifts and in return gave the captain some otter skins.⁷⁷

Crespi himself recounted anchoring in the roadstead of 'San Lorenzo' close to Nootka Sound, and when fifteen canoes came out 'they came near and began to trade with what they had in their canoes, which consisted only of skins of otters and other animals unknown to us . . . we noted that these Indians had a great liking for the shells and knives'.⁷⁸

Ceremonies of diplomatic gift exchange were initially confused by Cook and Strange with commercial transactions, but not so by the Mowachaht.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 197.

⁷⁶ Journal of Fray Juan Crespi kept during the same voyage of the *Santiago*, dated 5 October 1774, document 19, in Donald C. Cutter (ed.), *The California Coast: A Bilingual Edition of Documents from the Suro Collection* (Norman, Okla., 1969), 235.

⁷⁷ *Noticias de Nutka*, ed. and trans. Higbie Wilson, 66.

⁷⁸ 'Journal of Fray Juan Crespi', in Cutter (ed.), *California Coast*, 259.

Cook and later Strange, even with the knowledge of Cook's voyage, expected to exchange beads, glass and other trinkets, handkerchiefs and clothing for the provisions and furs they sought. These were only accepted at their first encounters.⁷⁹ The Mowachaht-Muchalaht First Nations, in an Agenda Paper in 1997 seeking recognition of Yuquot as a National Historic Site, drew on oral tradition, and wrote of ceremonial welcome and gift exchange with the purpose of binding Cook to them to maintain relations and to attract more visitors. They described their exchange of furs, combs, spoons and hats as being for things of great value: iron axes and cloth.⁸⁰ A ceremonial exchange of diplomatic gifts when Cook left the Sound was perceived on both sides to cement future connections. The chief of Yuquot gave Cook a valuable beaver-skin cloak, and Cook presented him with a 'New Broad Sword with a brass hilt'.⁸¹ When Archibald Menzies and Captain Vancouver as well as Malaspina first arrived in 1791, there were similar customs of first meeting.⁸² The gifted objects of first encounter on the north-west Pacific coast have their own histories, and were later dispersed to collections in Britain, North America and New Zealand, and included in Europe's collections in London, Vienna, Florence, Moscow, Göttingen and Berlin.⁸³

Protocols of gift exchange based on the principle of 'reciprocal presents' were vital to the success of subsequent trade. Joshua Reid analysed the distinctive protocols of ceremonies of gift giving when a later British trader, John Meares in his ship *Felice* entered the waters of the Mowachaht and the Clayoquot in 1787. The protocols had specific meanings to the indigenous peoples. The first protocol on the water demonstrated to Meares that he had

⁷⁹ For an older anthropological discussion of the symbolic meanings of gifts and exchange see John Davis, *Exchange* (Buckingham, 1992), 9–46, 75–87.

⁸⁰ Mowachaht-Muchalaht First Nations, 'Yuquot Agenda Paper', in Hoover (ed.), *Nuu-chah-nulth Voices*, 11–33, 19.

⁸¹ Nicholas Thomas, *The Extraordinary Voyages of Captain Cook* (New York, 2003), 363–4.

⁸² *A Voyage round the World . . . by Étienne Marchand*, i, 191; Malaspina and Menzies, watching such arrival ceremonies in August 1792, saw Maquinna taking tea on board vessels on arrival, and accepting presents including window panes and copper sheets on departure. See Malaspina, *Malaspina Expedition*, ed. David et al., ii, 179, 186; Menzies' *Journal of Vancouver's Voyage April to October, 1792*, ed. C. F. Newcombe, Archives of British Columbia Memoir No. V (Victoria, BC, 1923), 115.

⁸³ See Adrienne Kaeppler, 'Gifting, Trading, Selling, Buying', in Barnett and Nicandri, *Arctic Ambitions*, 171–89; Adrienne Kaeppler, *Holophusicon — The Leverian Museum: An Eighteenth-Century Institution of Science, Curiosity and Art* (Altenstadt, 2011); Monica Zarattaro, 'Gli Oggetti Americani della Raccolta James Cook', in Jacopo Moggi Cecchi and Roscoe Stanyon, *Il Museo di Storia Naturale dell'Università degli Studi di Firenze*, v, Le collezioni antropologiche ed etnologiche (Florence, 2014), 148–52.

entered their sovereign spaces. The fleets of canoes demonstrated the sea power of each chief. Meares' gifts to the chiefs aboard ship demonstrated to the chiefs that Meares acknowledged their sovereignty and paid to anchor in their waters. When chief Maquinna gave to Meares his very valuable sea-otter robe he demonstrated hospitality and authority. Other later gift exchanges in the chiefs' longhouses were played out in front of large indigenous audiences and affirmed the authority of the chiefs.⁸⁴

V

TRADE

Walker was surprised by, but described in great detail, a highly sophisticated trade which immediately developed. He recalled the first approaches of the canoes with the people offering everything they had for sale, but they would not part with their own goods 'before they had received an equivalent, they never forgot to examine our goods'.⁸⁵ Walker also watched Captain Strange who 'guarded his currency', and conducted all the trade from one of the two ships. Walker was surprised by the highly commercial economy of the sea-otter trade that he found in Nootka Sound. From his own preconceptions and his reading of Enlightenment texts, he had expected the behaviour of a society of hunters, little developed in the division of labour that would underpin the later human stages of agriculture, manufacturing and trade.⁸⁶ Instead he found himself surrounded by a sophisticated trading culture.

The episodes of trade described by Walker take us into the circulation of commodities so readily assumed by global historians as a flow, but instead reveal issues of value, misrecognized, misplaced. The beads and baubles of gift exchange were almost immediately cast aside. 'As we advanced up the Sound, the price of everything became more exorbitant: the natives totally despising Glasses, Beads and other Bawbles, and were only to be satisfied with brass, copper or iron'.⁸⁷ Walker also struggled to understand the frequently erratic shifting of values given to these metals. 'These Americans showed great inconstancy in their desires after different commodities, an article of Trade being one Day in high estimation, and next Day totally despised'.⁸⁸

Walker carefully followed the value placed by First Nations peoples on different types of iron and copper goods. Sometimes they preferred

⁸⁴ Reid, *The Sea is My Country*, 30–4.

⁸⁵ Walker, *Account of a Voyage to the North West Coast of America*, ed. Fisher and Bumsted, 240.

⁸⁶ Sebastiani, *The Scottish Enlightenment*, 73–5.

⁸⁷ Walker, *Account of a Voyage to the North West Coast of America*, ed. Fisher and Bumsted, 43.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 108.

unwrought iron, but they consistently sought 'chisels', or iron bars and copper. Crespi, then later Mociño and Menzies all gave close attention to the attraction of iron. Crespi wrote 'It is apparent that they have a great liking for articles made of iron for cutting, if they be not small. For beads they did not show a great liking. . . . the women wore rings on their fingers and bracelets, of iron and of copper'.⁸⁹ Mociños later tied the history of commerce on the north-west Pacific to the introduction of copper and iron:

Captain Cook found in them a knowledge of iron and copper . . . it appears indisputable that they acquired these metals by trading on the continent with other nations which came to make exchange . . . Captain [James] Cook gave them some copper, and his crew bought a number of sea otters in exchange for pieces of this metal, knives, fishhooks, glass beads, and other trifles. The natives believed that they had succeeded in unloading their merchandise at a very advantageous price . . . they tripled their small capital by means of the copper which, leaving the hands of the Nootkans, began to disperse itself throughout almost all the Archipelago.⁹⁰

Mociño recognized that the levels of trade in copper and iron which Cook started opened a new epoch, one marked by the great disproportion in the values of the metals as perceived by the indigenous peoples and the Europeans.

Copper was perceived to be even more valuable than iron. Cook had reported its desirability. 'Nothing would go down with our visitors but metal; and brass had by this time supplanted iron, being so eagerly sought after, that, before we left this place, hardly a bit of it was left in the ships'.⁹¹ Walker also followed the value placed on the metals, reporting the response to the sight of an iron anchor: 'It was equal to the surprise which we should probably express were we to see among any People all the Instruments of labour and of domestic use, made of Gold'.⁹² They had a high regard for copper; offered copper kettles, they eagerly examined them for quality, and 'immediately cut them up into bracelets and earrings'.⁹³

A bit of Copper six Inches long, and one broad, was preferred to the best Tool in our Possession, but large pieces of iron, Hatchets, and

⁸⁹ *Journal of Fray Juan Crespi*, in Cutter (ed.), *California Coast*, 237, 239.

⁹⁰ *Noticias de Nutka*, ed. and trans. Higbie Wilson, 65.

⁹¹ John Barrow (ed.), *Captain Cook's Voyages of Discovery* (London, 1860), 342.

⁹² Walker, *Account of a Voyage to the North West Coast of America*, ed. Fisher and Bumsted, 42.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 52.

Chisels, were nevertheless prized . . . A Chisel, five Inches long, and very broad towards the end, they preferred to all other Tools, even to a Saw, Hatchet or Sabre, although we had instructed them in the use of these Instruments.⁹⁴

The crew took to manufacturing standard-length chisels for trade on board the *Experiment* and named them John Porter chisels after the blacksmith. The chisel, Walker wrote, was their key cutting tool used in smoothing boards, making their canoes and in their carved work; they had rude knives, no hammers and needles made of bone.⁹⁵

Europeans quickly learned of astute commercial dealings by the peoples of Nootka Sound and those of Haida Gwaii; captains soon to visit the area were warned, and published accounts such as those of Meares and of Dixon and Portlock conveyed these warnings.⁹⁶ James Strange was prepared for this from his reading of Cook's journals, and Walker reported that 'we need to maintain the value of our currency'. It was 'necessary that we should not appear too easy and anxious to possess any of their articles'.⁹⁷ All trade was carried on by Strange himself, and was conducted from the *Captain Cook*. Strange always went out in a boat with a variety of goods, and the Mowachaht remained in their canoes. They 'exhibited their goods with all possible art . . . they knew as well as we did how to put their goods to best advantage'. When there was any disagreement over the price, 'they had recourse to a thousand little arts to make him give more'.⁹⁸ 'One would take up the Fur, and measuring it by extending his arms, endeavour to make us sensible how large it was; another would smooth it down with his hand, and expatiate on the fineness and colour of the Fur.'⁹⁹

Walker distinguished different groups of visitors to the ship: some seemed richer and 'more avaricious'. From their more extensive acquaintance and experience in trade, they were better informed of the value of Property. 'How often', he reflected, 'is this superior knowledge mistaken for Avarice?'¹⁰⁰ Walker's comment revealed a perceptive understanding of the trade, and one entirely lacking in the report of Captain Strange. Strange wrote that the people of Nootka Sound 'were as thoroughly versed in the little frauds

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 109.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 109.

⁹⁶ Fisher, *Contact and Conflict*, 8–10.

⁹⁷ Walker, *Account of a Voyage to the North West Coast of America*, ed. Fisher and Bumsted, 4.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 59.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 42.

usually practiced to allure and deceive, as if they had the Experience of a Century's intercourse with Us'.¹⁰¹

Certainly by 1792 there was an intense commercialization of the trade as it was conducted by the indigenous groups up the coast. The demand for iron moved on to copper sheets, European clothing and muskets.¹⁰² Strange and Walker, like Cook before them, found groups of highly sophisticated maritime traders with rich goods to exchange, and looking for new exchange items, not just for use or decoration, but to enhance their authority amongst other indigenous groups.

VI

THE MOWACHAHT AND THE STRANGERS

Exchange also revealed a complex organization of trade among the indigenous peoples. Walker described how the trade was monopolized by the Mowachaht; they referred to other indigenous groups as 'strangers'. They either acted as intermediaries for other tribes, or only allowed access to the European traders by others once they had sold all their own trade goods: 'Even this was done under restrictions — they constituted themselves the agents or brokers'. They 'claimed exclusive privilege of buying or selling anything', and 'carefully watched and excluded Strangers from any intercourse with us'.¹⁰³

These strangers were other aligned and related groups within the Nuuchah-nulth language family. Alliances with these groups were carefully fostered. Gift exchange and property rights connected as much to strangers as to Europeans. Walker noticed the complexity of the relationship of the Mowachaht to these strangers. There were also close kinship relations with the Clayaquot and the Makah to the south. Those from the north had to trade through the Mowachaht; those from the south, regarded as peoples of

¹⁰¹ Strange, *James Strange's Journal and Narrative of the Commercial Expedition from Bombay to the North-West Coast of America*, ed. Venkatarama Ayyar, 42.

¹⁰² *A Voyage round the World . . . by Étienne Marchand*, i, 180, 191–5.

¹⁰³ Walker, *Account of a Voyage to the North West Coast of America*, ed. Fisher and Bumsted, 110; Cook too had reported: 'The inhabitants residing within the sound engrossed all our Trade to themselves as much as possible, and it was not until they had sold most of their Commodities, that we were visited by any strangers', see Barrow, *Captain Cook's Voyages*, 343–5. James Colnett, in the year following Strange's voyage, also discussed the relations between the Mowachaht and neighbouring tribal groups: Colnett, *A Voyage to the Northwest Side of America*, ed. Galois, editor's intro., 35–6. John Jewitt in his account of his captivity in 1803 reported on the visits of 'strangers' from 'no less than twenty tribes tributary to the Nootka, and of practices of exchange of presents, and none but the chiefs carrying arms', Jewitt, *Adventures and Sufferings of John R. Jewitt*, 56–9.

superior power and riches, could trade on their own behalf.¹⁰⁴ Walker reported an entertainment and feast they attended for such strangers, where each was given an entire dried salmon to eat, and commented, 'Savages can seldom afford to be liberal; but in the instance here mentioned, their hospitality would of course be regulated by their means, and by the degree of affinity or of friendship in which they might stand towards their Visitors'.¹⁰⁵

The trade goods received from non-native ships in exchange for furs were quickly circulated by the Mowachaht, the Clayaquot and the Makahs among their own community and with various neighbouring and related communities up and down the coast.¹⁰⁶ Connections and trade with these groups brought other sources of sea-otter furs, as these were traded from one group to the next. The focus of European trade on Nootka Sound enhanced the wealth and social priority of the Mowachaht.¹⁰⁷ The rapid rise of prices for furs experienced by the Europeans was paralleled by high price mark-ups for metals and other European goods traded on by the Mowachaht to other indigenous groups.¹⁰⁸

What agency, what voices of the marginal, might be revealed in these European accounts of these years at Nootka Sound? What are the different contexts for agency, and how can these be compared? A number of global historians have focused on individual encounters or interactions: they have studied merchants and companies, as well as the state or community officials and intermediaries that facilitated or blocked the global connections we now seek to understand.¹⁰⁹ The moments of decision-making that make for agency have wider and even global frameworks. The challenge for global historians is writing about episodes of agency in a specific time and place, but also of connecting this to long-term and long-distance structural explanations.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁴ Walker, *Account of a Voyage to the North West Coast of America*, ed. Fisher and Bumsted, 59.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 107.

¹⁰⁶ Reid, *The Sea is My Country*, 43–4.

¹⁰⁷ See Arima, *West Coast People*, 123.

¹⁰⁸ Fisher, *Contact and Conflict*, 10–12.

¹⁰⁹ See John-Paul Ghobrial, 'The Secret Life of Elias of Babylon and the Uses of Global Microhistory', *Past and Present*, no. 222 (Feb. 2014), 51–93.

¹¹⁰ For discussion of agency and global history in cases centred on Japan, Brazil and Angola, see Amy Stanley, 'Maid-servants' Tales: Narrating Domestic and Global History in Eurasia', *American Historical Review*, xvi, 2 (2016), 438–60; and Roquinaldo Ferreira, *Cross-Cultural Exchange in the Atlantic World: Angola and Brazil during the Era of the Slave Trade* (Cambridge, 2012), 2–12. Also compare the very different priorities of Tonio

property holding and rights when they visited a village. He reported that the Mowachaht gave them 'nothing without receiving an equivalent'; he paid a string of beads for a drink of water.¹¹⁷ Yet a few days later a few miles away they found others who assisted them in their wooding and watering, and we 'used all the spontaneous productions of the country as we chose'.¹¹⁸

The chiefs also in the early period controlled the access of European ships to the furs by accumulating these from other groups, strictly monitoring the trading activities of strangers, and choosing to hold back their furs in prospect of better exchange from the next ships to appear in their waters. The dynamic of the rivalry among the three main chiefs also shifted quite quickly into the 1790s as the sea otters around Nootka Sound were over-hunted, and European ships found easier supplies in the Makah territory to the south or further north up the coast.

VII EQUIVALENCE AND VALUE

In the trade in sea-otter furs and iron we see systems of barter and social regulation of the trade among First Nations groups and European fur traders. We witness issues of value and exchange as reciprocity. For Cook and the fur traders who followed, iron and copper were the materials of their industrial priority. They made up the fittings and tools of their ships; iron was the key metal of the firearms that underpinned the violence of the trade from its inception. How did these Europeans view this key currency of their barter? Did they value it? The journals seem to indicate no more than a common utilitarian value, and surprise at the value placed by indigenous peoples on the material rather than the objects and tools made of it, apart from iron chisels.

Walker commented that in their early encounters with the Mowachaht the 'harangues' from the people in the canoes 'seemed to exhort us strongly to furnish them with iron', and that in return they would 'give us anything we wanted'.¹¹⁹ Copper, as we have seen, was highly valued. During the two-day exchange with Callicum thirty fine sea-otter skins were exchanged for six small copper kettles.¹²⁰ The copper in such demand by the First Nations

oceans as the homeland of their peoples'. No one could take or harvest from specific marine and terrestrial places without permission, and recognition of the rules and protocols governing access, 126.

¹¹⁷ Walker, *Account of a Voyage to the North West Coast of America*, ed. Fisher and Bumsted, 45.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 56.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 40.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 52.

groups of the coast was already by 1791 transforming into a prize item of luxury accumulation for potlatch ceremony among the Nuu-chah-nulth. Malaspina, visiting the settlement in Tahsis that summer was taken to see Maquinna's hoard of copper ingots, and John Jewitt, the captive, reported in 1803 'making bracelets and ornaments of copper and steel for the king and his wives'.¹²¹

What value did indigenous peoples place on the sea-otter furs? The furs on their side were not a commonplace resource, but one also endowed with cultural significance in their mythology and ceremonial practices. The furs were significant in dress, in diplomatic exchange and potlatch. Mociño in his account of 1792 provided the most extended discussion of dress.

The sea otter provides a garment reserved only to the nobles of the first rank. It is formed from three good skins, two of which are left whole; from the third are made a number of equal strips, the ends of which protrude on both sides, and of this they made a cuff that has a certain elegance. The underside is ordinarily painted red with whimsical figures. When the weather is hot, they leave the fur on the outside; reversed, it provides them with greater protection in winter. In order to augment their finery, they sew on various tails of the same amphibious animal as a kind of trimming placed on the suit'.¹²²

The accounts of two late Enlightenment figures, Alexander Walker and José Mociño, reflected on this trade of metals and furs. Walker's account, although based on first-hand observations of a month spent living close to and in Yuquot was, as we have seen, written as it refracted through his later experience in India. This other context sharpened his comments on the divergent assessments between Europeans and the indigenous peoples of the values and equivalences of the goods they traded. This eighteenth-century understanding of local systems of attributing value and equivalence is usually neglected in global history approaches to trade flows where commodities are treated as standard currencies for both sides of the trade. In reality contemporaries realized there were divergences in their understanding of the goods they traded for, divergences which affected their values and the equivalences each side sought.

¹²¹ Malaspina, *Malaspina Expedition*, ed. David et al., ii 184; Jewitt, *Adventures and Sufferings of John R. Jewitt*, 61; Daniel Clayton, *Islands of Truth: The Imperial Fashioning of Vancouver Island* (Vancouver, 2000), 141.

¹²² *Noticias de Nutka*, ed. and trans. Higbie Wilson, 14.

Walker added to his account of this trade on the north-west Pacific coast a late Enlightenment discussion of luxury and savage society, and the impact of commerce on civilization. Some of this discussion was informed by what he had read of later developments in the trade on the north-west Pacific coast and by Russian advances in the sea-otter trade. He introduced his *Account* with a broad commentary on the subject: 'The life of a Savage is mixed with uncertainty and privations: but its excitements and its habits are dear to him . . . Every attempt to reconcile him to the Ease and luxuries of civilized Life have failed'.¹²³ Walker finally concluded that the sea-otter trade with the north-west coastal peoples had not brought them wealth and civilization, but disease, social dislocation, corruption, and environmental depletion, especially of the sea otter.¹²⁴

Mociño, likewise reflecting on the trade from a broad Enlightened perspective, though from a significantly more romanticist standpoint, wrote of the impact of the copper trade on the indigenous peoples:

One does not see here greed for another man's wealth, because articles of prime necessity are very few and all are common . . . The trade with Europeans has allowed them to become acquainted with various things which they would have been better off without forever, conserving the primitive simplicity of their customs. Copper, which among them has the same value gold has to us, has introduced part of the misfortune greed always causes.¹²⁵

* * *

Events of trade between indigenous peoples and Europeans at Yuquot in Nootka during one month in 1786 reveal the wide networks of global commodity trade in the later eighteenth century. Intersecting with the extensive North American trade networks of the First Nations people came a new maritime fur trade connecting Europe and the north Atlantic with the Pacific, China and India. Ultimately not a major trade in its quantitative economic impact, its early potential attracted significant mercantile ventures and affected the imperial ambitions and geopolitics of European empires, and of Russia, China and America. Viewed through the text of an idiosyncratic East India Company soldier, we see new close connections between the Pacific, south and east Asia, and the Atlantic world. Yuquot was on the edge of the world, yet connected with much of it. We also witness encounters

¹²³ Walker, *Account of a Voyage to the North West Coast of America*, ed. Fisher and Bumsted, 37.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 148.

¹²⁵ *Noticias de Nutka*, ed. and trans. Higbie Wilson, 43, 50, 95.

of trade between two highly sophisticated and highly networked groups of maritime traders, the Mowachaht First Nation and the English East India Company. Alexander Walker's account of his month in Yuquot opens key questions over commodities, trade and value. Cast and wrought iron and copper, signifiers of European industrial modernity, had become global commodities by the mid eighteenth century. The furs were quite different; they were a non-renewable resource imbued with cultural significance to the peoples who lived in their territories and with luxury status to the Chinese who desired them. One locality and a text of encounter and trade in this locality deepen our understanding of the wide global commodity flows of the eighteenth-century world. A place and a text also open questions for our historiographies, still so separately focused on individual regions and oceans of the world.

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